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A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL
LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES, CINCINNATI,
SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1883.

BY MAJOR W. H. BELL, U. S. A.



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IN this paper I shall be entirely dependent upon my memory for dates, and even for facts; but, as near as may be, at this distant date, so distant from the occurrences of which I am about to speak, I shall give an account of what took place, as nearly and as fully as possible, and take as my point of departure, as the sailor men say, the Post of Fort Clark in Western-Middle Texas, and the time as about the first of March, 1861. I was a bridegroom then, having been married in the ancient city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, some months before. My honey-moon was still at its full; every thing was of a roseate hue, and remained so, I might add, parenthetically, until, as is, I believe, the general experience, it became black and blue under the application of the metaphorical broomstick;

but, just at this time, I did my duty with a zest and springiness of purpose that was the outgrowth of my beatitude, even to the "shinning it," on all fours, across a log that spanned the Las Moras River, to visit a sentinel, as "officer of the day," when the night was so dark that the log was invisible and the sentinel, apt to make *himself* discernible by the flash of his musket, as he first fired and then challenged; so that one can well see that my mind was in such a condition as to receive only pleasurable emotions, and my whole being was rudely shaken, when the news was received at the post, that an amicable division was to be effected between the North and the South; that we were to take post on one of the great northern lakes, and that we were to be relieved by a company of state troops that would be sent up to the post for the purpose. This was wonderful news, indeed, but as our newspapers had been detained by the uncertainty of the mails, as we supposed, for there were then no railroads and our letters were few and far between, and the contents confined entirely to family matters, those being overhauled and confiscated that contained other news, as I afterward discovered, we were brought tardily to the belief that the facts were as stated, and confirmed by the knowledge that the order for the evacuation came direct from General Twiggs, then commanding the department, so that matters were soon en train for the movement. I was then a second lieutenant of one of the companies of the regiment, the old Third Infantry, and was the quartermaster and commissary of the post, with a large amount of quartermaster's property on my hands, among other things a large saw mill, and, I think, a battery of six brass pieces, so that I must have been also the acting ordinance officer at the time. To receive these things it

was ordered that a "commissioner of the State of Texas," so called, a Dr. Cummings, was to arrive with the Texas troops, and from him I was directed to take receipts for all of my responsibility, and thus cover my indebtedness to the United States. But few days were left to us in which to make our preparations for the journey, and, among other things, it was necessary to look about for such transportation as would be suitable for myself and my wife. Now, I had an ambulance, the one that brought us from New Mexico, but I could not get a single mule to haul it. Three riding horses were a part of my outfit, but neither of them had ever had a collar on his neck, and I was in despair, until I consulted Captain George Sykes—afterward Major-General Sykes—when he, in the goodness of his heart offered to assist me in breaking two of the horses to the pole. But here another trouble arose, the ambulance was too heavy for the two animals, and I was again in the *depths*. Good fortune favored me, however, in the form of the sutler from Fort Ingo, who was at Fort Clark on a visit, and had with him a two horse top buggy. I made a trade for my ambulance, with what "boot" I do not now recollect, and as I had harness, we soon had the horses hooked up, and, after a few wild dashes, finding that they were not going to be hurt, they went along quietly enough, and Sykes and I, during the ensuing time, drove them out every day from the front of my quarters and back without stopping. Then a morning arrived upon which, after reveille, we saw a number of strange men moving about the garrison, the most motley crew I ever beheld, in groups and singly, examining every thing in sight, and one rather better dressed than the others, standing on the porch of the commanding officer's quarters, talking to Capt. O. L. Sheppard,

who was in command. None were in uniform : but, “on the contrary, quite the reverse,” unless, indeed, their uniform slouchiness could be considered as such, and these, we were told, were the State troops that had come to relieve us. What the commander’s name was I never learned, or have forgotten, as I was, from that time until we evacuated, very busy in turning over my property to Dr. Cummings, to whom I was soon introduced, and at it we went, hammer and tongs, and in about two days had completed the transfer, and I held the doctor’s receipts. On my papers were two sets of halliards, one in store and the other on the flag-staff, which I pointed out to the doctor through one of the windows of the building, and he was willing to receipt for it as of the same length as the one that he had measured, although he asked me once or twice whether I was sure it was right. Now, in the order for the evacuation it was directed, that we were to march out with our arms, side-arms, and personal property, and to salute the flag, and upon the eventful morning of our exodus I was directed to take command of the battery, which was directly in front of the flag-staff, and fire the national salute, and immediately after the troops were to take the route. The wagons were all hitched up and had pulled out on the road, the officers’ ambulances were at their respective doors, and my buggy and the two newly broken horses were standing in front of my “two pens and a passage” (a second lieutenant’s allowance of quarters), with a soldier at their heads. I was about to commence firing, when I noticed the officer in command of the Texas troops standing at some little distance with somet hing under his left arm, that was perfectly recognizable as a flag ; but, certainly, not the old stars and stripes, and I determined in a

second that it should not wave over our heads, or even within our range of vision ; so, stepping over to the sergeant, who had the halliards in his hand ready to lower away as soon as the salute had been completed, I whispered to him to get the bight of the rope in his hand, and without allowing any one to see him, cut it in two, and when I gave him the signal to be sure that the halliards came down with the flag, at the same time passing him my knife, which I had contrived, unseen, to open. Being sure that he understood the order, I went back to the guns and commenced firing, and as soon as the last gun belched forth its volume of smoke I threw up my hand toward the sergeant, when down came the flag and up went the loose end of the halliard, whipping about like a snake as it felt the motion, until it gave two or three sharp wiggles and passed, like lightning, through the block and fell in a coil upon the ground. The troops were then wheeled into a column of platoons and away they went, five companies strong, to the music of the band, down the road toward the coast and the starting point for the voyage home, when I crossed over to my buggy, assisted my wife to her seat, and jumped in beside her. As I drove out I passed the doctor and the captain of the state troops, who was still standing with his flag under his arm ; his face as black as a thunder cloud, and without drawing rein called to the commissioner : “ There is the other set of halliards, doctor, if you desire to measure them,” and was soon up with and passing the command, as we wished to stop at a farm house, a mile further on, to get some eggs and butter for our trip, and as I got to the top of the hill and looked back before we started on the descent, there was no flag flying at our old flag-staff, but I could see a man

climbing it to re-reeve the halliards, and just then I began to perceive a mistake that Sykes and I had made in breaking the horses to harness. We had taught them to pull all right, but had never instructed them in the highly necessary art of stopping, except at my own door, where, really, they had always stopped of their own accord; for, as soon as we got on the down grade and the breeching struck them, they started at a brisk gait, and a donkey-engine would not have pulled them up, they did not know how to stop and absolutely ran away with me at a trot, and were only checked by putting them into a pailing fence that surrounded the farm-house, when it is only a wonder that we did not get our necks broken, then and there, as on the other side of this fence, and close to it, were two hives of bees, over the apertures of which a kind Providence must have put his thumbs or the horses would have been covered with the stinging insects in a second, when there would have been a cyclone of horses, buggy, and newly married couple. But we were enabled to make our purchases in peace, and when the command had passed we were ready and took our places in the rear of the train of ambulances, as befitted the rank of a second lieutenant, and then, with the back of a vehicle to run the pole into, in a case of necessity, the team was taught the mysteries of stopping when it was required of them. From here we traveled with nothing more of interest than the usual routine of the road, making good daily drives, and a turn out for luncheon and to let the mules graze and roll; camping, for the most part, on beautiful spots with plenty of those requirements of a traveler of that day—wood, water, and grass. During this time I heard but little discussion among the

officers of the command as to the situation of affairs and the great changes that had come upon us. It did not, of course, seem right that the country of which we were all so proud, and which was ever before us through the symbol of the flag that floated above our heads daily, should be dismembered; but we had known of the long existing bitterness that had existed between certain factions that were divided by "Mason and Dixon's line," and our orders, coming to us as they did, through legitimate channels, accompanied by expressions of gratitude and almost affection from the state authorities, we thought that some compromise had been effected, and that the country was divided, as the rumor had stated, and we could only obey the orders that we had received. Among the officers of Southern birth in the command there was no talk or thought of leaving us, as far as I know or can recollect; nor did I hear or witness the expression of much feeling but once, and that in the case of an individual officer, who passed us in his ambulance with his wife, on his way to his wife's home in Arkansas, to recruit his health. He and I had been great friends and had suffered some trials together, and when his party overtook us he got out of his wagon, and taking me a short distance from the road, we talked of the situation of affairs, as we knew it, when Steen told me, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, poor fellow, that he would never desert "the old gridiron," as he called the flag, as long as it flew; but, alas, the Rector influence at Fort Smith was too much for him, and he died in his first battle at Pea Ridge, as a rebel brigadier. Thus we traveled along, day after day, with but little to break the monotony, through long stretches of open country and

straggling towns, until Sykes gave us something to both think of and smell. Strict orders had been given to break up the foraging of the men, and the orders had been directed especially toward the prevention of the capture and demolition of hogs (or "slow deer" as the soldiers called them), but in spite of this, four of Sykes' men had been caught in absolute possession of a dead pig. This funeral procession of four, with the corpse, was marched to the guard tent and Captain Sykes notified, and then commenced a punishment that lasted for days, that was hard on the offenders and mortifying to the hog, and did not produce the perfume of either of the "Lubin extracts" for the command. He ordered the animal to be quartered and a quarter to be hung about the necks of each of the offenders, and these necklaces, with their pendants, were to be worn day and night until further orders. About the middle of the second day, under the influence of the warm sun, the effect of this treatment began to make itself manifest, for, with the light, easterly wind, such odors swept back over the train and the column as were never inhaled in the land of "Araby the blest," and every body foreswore pork and cursed Sykes' devilish ingenuity in the same breath. Toward evening it became unbearable, and a deputation waited upon him and begged him, by every thing that he held sacred, to give us a rest. The pork was buried, the air became pure again, but there was no more hog stealing. Day by day we ate up our rations and a part of the two hundred miles of our journey, until we found ourselves but a short distance from San Antonio, Texas, where we were met by an orderly with a message from Colonel Waite, who had by this time relieved General Twiggs of the

command of the department. This was a suggestion to our commanding officer, that as there was some excitement among the citizens of that place it would be well if the command were marched around the city. Why the citizens should be excited we could not, at that time, imagine, as we had had full assurance of their good will from their representatives. However, the old regiment was not in the habit of sneaking around by the by-ways when the main road was open, and Major Sheppard called a council of the officers, the matter was laid before it, and without a dissenting voice it was determined that the trunks and boxes should be opened and full dress uniform gotten out and put on; band instruments unpacked and the regimental flags removed from their cases, and that we should march through San Antonio with every thing that we possessed flying, blowing, and beating so that for a while every thing was in confusion and the leeward side of every wagon in the train became an extemporized dressing-room. In the meantime I was handed an order which came by the orderly, directing me to report to Colonel Waite, in San Antonio, as the quartermaster and acting commissary of subsistence of the command, and turning my wife over to the care of one of the officers, I got into my saddle and was soon dismounting, opposite to a group of officers who were standing in front of the Mengar House, the hotel of the city, and upon expressing my desire to see the department commander, a gray-haired officer stepped from the party and said that he was Colonel Waite, and when I told him who I was his first question was as to how much government money I had in my possession. Upon telling him that I had about \$3,500 he seemed very much excited, and said, in almost a

whisper, that I should not talk so loud or it might chance that the money would be taken from me. I replied that with the command at my back I did not believe that that could be done, but he warned me to be careful, and after a short conversation as to the condition of the troops, he dismissed me, with directions to return as soon as the column had passed through the town, for I had told him of Sheppard's determination. I rode to the outskirts of the city in the direction from which our people were to come, and met them just as they entered, colors flying, band playing, drum major nearly turning himself inside out with his baton, and every man and officer as fine as brass and bullion could make him; and now occurred an incident that I can never forget. An old, bare-headed, gray-haired gentleman, whose name I afterward found to be Bell, a jeweler of San Antonio, also met the column. He was wrapped from head to foot in an American flag, as a mantle, and stood in the middle of the road waiting. As soon as the drum major was within a few feet of him, he faced about, took the step, and with his head high in the air, and his old eyes flashing, he marched through the town and past its last houses in the suburbs and then fell out and was cheered to the echo as the column passed him. I was afterward told that he lived in San Antonio and was loyal throughout the whole war. Seeing the command, to its last wagon, through the city, I turned my horse and galloped back to Colonel Waite's headquarters, told him of the passage of the troops and the patriotic incident connected with it; received some instructions from him, then set my face toward camp, for it was by this time growing late, and the sun having disappeared, rapidly becoming dark, and upon my clearing the town

in the direction taken by the column, I was bewildered by the number of roads, or trails, that branched out in all directions like the sticks of a fan, none fenced in, and one looking as likely as the other to be the proper one to take: but seeing a man on horseback ahead of me, weaving slightly in his saddle as he rode, showing that he was carrying double and that John Barleycorn was his crupper companion, I galloped up, and, touching my cap, asked him if he would kindly inform me which road I must take to find the camp of the troops that had passed through the city that afternoon. He pulled up his pony, took a cross-eyed sort of a look at me, and then, with a suppressed hic-cough, told me that his way lead directly past there, and that he would take pleasure in showing me my camp fires, which, no doubt, we would find lighted on the bank of the Rio Salado, and off we started, at a moderate trot, conversing as we rode. He told me that he too had been connected with the army, as a paymaster's clerk, but that he now owned a ranch, and was on his way to it, we then broached the subject of the troops leaving the country, when he turned to me and said, very earnestly: "You fellows should not be allowed to carry your arms with you. They should be left to the State of Texas." I answered him by saying that that had already been granted and agreed to, by the state officials, and that all troops stationed in the state should so leave. "Yes," said he, with the persistence of a drunken man, "I know that, but all the same it shouldn't be allowed." This vexed me and I said to him: "Well, my friend, if you think that you can get enough men together, between this and the coast, to take the arms away, why don't you try it?" He laughed, and coming

then into a strip of woods, I saw the twinkle of a fire, and he, seeing it at the same moment, stretched his arm in its direction and said, "There's your camp, lieutenant, and here's my trail," and without waiting for me to thank him, dashed up a steep bank to our left and was out of sight in a second, and I trotted along to camp to find the fires burning, tents pitched, a good tin-cup of toddy, and a most savory supper awaiting me. Early morning saw us on the road again, and during this day's march public opinion, in the form of my better half, was so brought to bear upon me that I was compelled to forego the pleasure of again pulling the lines over my two sturdy ponies. The cause of this change of base being an acrobatic performance, on their part, that was not down on the bills. At a certain part of the road there was a sharp descent into the dry bed of a creek, the road being graded somewhat to make it easier to pull down and out, thus leaving a fourteen-foot bank on either side next to the creek, and decreasing in height as the road got nearer to and finally struck the plain above. The carriages were some distance apart, and I made the descent very handsomely until we struck the bed of the creek, which was only a few yards wide, when my near horse did not seem willing or able to remove his weight from the breeching and in leaning back and over he touched the off horse on his rump. If lightning had struck us, "end on," we could not have landed on the upper plateau quicker. There was a fierce plunge to the left and up the bank we went, the whole outfit standing at an angle of forty-five degrees for an instant of time, then all hands on a dead level and a sudden stop, with fifteen or twenty of the men corraling the team. Result, a broken doubletree and my wife's

faith gone out of the back of the buggy as we came up the incline, and a public proclamation, made by her, that she would not ride another mile behind them. That settled it, and the horses were replaced by a pair of mules that two of the officers had been riding, and the saddles shifted to my stock, and on the long ears of the mules my wife pinned her faith, although the average runaways, from that to the coast, was at least twice a day. The trip, so far, had been such a pleasant one generally, that our arrival at Green Lake, some twenty miles distant from the coast, as I recollect it, was reached all too soon. But here we were, and here we were to go into camp to wait for the rest of the regiment to arrive at Indianola, from Ringold Barracks, on the Rio Grande, as it had been arranged that all of the companies, with the band and regimental headquarters, were to embark for New York in the same vessel, the *Empire City*. Tents were soon pitched, those of the officers on the bank of this beautiful body of fresh water, and those of the men a little back from it; and then we had a short time, before dark, to have a look about us, the result of which was that we found about five companies of the Second Cavalry with the band and headquarters of that regiment in camp just above us, making their preparations for their departure in the next transport that should arrive after we had sailed. This made quite a large command for those days, as a regiment of troops, in number, was then seldom seen. On this beautiful spot we stayed for three weeks, waiting for Major Sibley, with the rest of our companies. Nothing especial occurring, excepting the loss of one of my horses by theft, and the nightly terror of an Apache

Indian girl, who was acting as maid to my wife, lest the alligators, one or two of which she had seen, should make their midnight meal off her, as she laid on her blankets under the extra fly in front of the tent, and we generally found her inside, alongside of our bed before morning. At last the commanding officer of the camp, Colonel Larkin Smith, became impatient at the delay and issued an order that we, with the five companies of cavalry and their "outfit," should embark on the steamer then waiting for us off the bar at Indianola, and that the companies of the Third, when they got around, should take the next steamer. In a very short time we were on the road again, and soon found ourselves encamped on a little stream just north of the suburbs of the town of Indianola, and as the grass was scant here Major Sheppard ordered the mule herd and horses to be driven back until the wagon-master found better grazing. Intending to go into the town on business, I picketed my horse just back of my tent with a full scope of lariat, and Captain Brooks kept up his carriage mules as he wished to drive his establishment into town and sell it. His mules were picketed some little distance off and were quietly picking up such scant provender as fell within their limits. I was sitting in front of my tent writing, when my attention was attracted by a rustling in the tall reeds on the other side of the stream. I looked up, and as I did so saw a large camel push his way through and commence to cross to our side. Others followed until six or seven were crossing. I never thought of our animals and the well known terror that mules and horses have for these single turreted beasts, but as they rose

the bank I heard a double-barrelled snort and a whistle, then a scramble and a pull, and then the sound of flying feet, and jumping up I looked over the side of my tent roof and there went Brooks' mules covering the ground with immense strides, and, at every jump looking back over their shoulders, the picket pins striking the ground and bounding into the air to the full length of the lariat, as the mules hunted the herd. My horse had not seen the camels as the tent was between him and them; but, when I got a position from which I could see him, he was standing with his head stretched well up and his eyes full of wonder, as to what in thunder was the matter with Brooks' mules. Just then he caught sight, through "the tail of his eye," of the leading camel, as it walked lazily out to the plain beyond. He swung his head around, and, as he looked, his tail commenced to go slowly up until it was perfectly perpendicular, and the loose end fell over on his back, and then, with a squealing snort that could have been heard for half a mile, he commenced a sort of a stiff-legged trot around a circle at the length of his tethers, each stroke of his feet on the ground sending him two feet into the air like a rubber ball, but never losing sight of the camels for an instant. I spoke to him, and, as I passed along pulled up the picket pin and, coiling his lariat, was soon alongside of him. By this time the camels had passed, and as he evinced a desire to inspect them more closely I walked out some distance with him, but the camels walked so much faster than we did that we soon gave it up and went back. These animals were owned by a woman in Indianola, for what purpose I do not know, as I do not think that

they were ever used as beasts of burden, nor did they show any saddle or harness marks. The next day I sold one of my horses, my buggy, and the double harness for \$60, and made an arrangement, with a citizen of Indianola to send my other horse (the one that carried so high a flag for the camels) to me in the East, by the way of New Orleans and the Mississippi River, so little did I suspect, or know, of the actual condition of affairs in the country. Of course I never saw the horse again, and the next day we prepared to embark, and, for this, we were required to use the services of two small steamers, the "United States" and the "Fashion," as lighters to go out to our ship, which drew too much water to cross the Indianola bar, and was obliged to lay at her anchors, some ten miles out. It was arranged that the troops should all go out on the "Fashion," which was the larger boat of the two, and the ladies, and camp-women, and children (of which there was a swarm) on the "United States." To the duty of caring for them and assisting them to get on board of the Empire City, I was detailed; so, before starting, I got the ladies and children into the cabin and the brigade of camp women mustered on deck, and then, leaving my pistol and the bag containing all of my money on the table in the cabin in charge of my wife, I bustled about to see that nothing had been forgotten, and remained until the lines had been cast off at the wharf; when, upon returning to the cabin to get every-body on deck, I found that my pistol, belt, and the satchel containing the money had all disappeared, and they staid disappeared, too, so that I might say that I left pretty much all that I possessed

in the land of the lariat and the cow-boy. There was no time, however, to grieve over what could not now be remedied, so I asked all of the ladies to take their places on deck, and as there was some swell, which I knew would increase as we got to the bar, and possibly be breaking a little outside, I caused them all to stand in a ring, holding hands, and balancing to the roll of the boat, to keep them from getting sea-sick, enjoining the same upon the camp women, and was so far successful that I got every female on that boat aboard of the steamer without one single tribute having been paid to Neptune, although, when we got on the bar, I thought that the old United States would surely turn a summersault. When we got alongside of the ship the two would roll apart so far, at times, as to drop a long steamship gang-plank into the water, between them, and the whole of the railing, on the port side of the Fashion, was torn from her from stem to stern. The ladies and camp women were, however, transferred without accident, and most of them, who had not profited by their experience in standing up to the roll, were soon below, in their state-rooms. Then came the tug of war—the necessary solution of the problem as to how we were to get the children aboard. To do this we had to wait for the roll of the vessels together, and, while they touched, and as long as they touched, to pass the youngsters aboard “by hand.” I had the little tots huddled in behind me, as I stood on the low rail, holding on to a stay and Lieutenant Arnold, of the Cavalry, stood opposite to me on the rail of the ship, and, as the opportunity occurred, I passed him a child. Now as every camp woman had about six, on an average,

it took some time to make the transfer, while each woman stood as close to the rail as possible to claim her own, it being perfectly easy to tell to whom each child belonged (as it was hoisted up for passing) by the expression on the mother's face, until it was in her arms. The lighters were then paid off; the baggage stored away forward; we lay rolling and pitching at our anchors, and every one was worn out by the work and excitement of the long day, while, some half a mile off, further up the bar, laid a gunboat that was to convoy us as far as Havana, where it was decided that we should take in coal; and, about sundown, a boat came off from her with the information that she would get under way about dark, and would stand off and on, with more sea room than she had where she was, until we should come up; and I may as well say, right here, that we did not see her again until we had been in Havana nearly two days, as a fierce norther sprang up the next morning, and I suppose that she had as much as she could do to look out for herself, without bothering her head about us. I know that we were kept pretty busy. I will say but little about the distribution of the men in the temporary bunks that had been put up in the steerage of the ship. Suffice it, that the presence of two officers of each command was necessary in that black hole of Calcutta to superintend it, and, as Sykes and I were the only two of the infantry command that could hold our heads up, by this time, the duty fell to us. The ship was very much crowded, and to get to the forehatch it was necessary to crawl over those who were lying prone upon the deck, as limp as dish-rags: and, when we got below,

the decks there were just awash with what had been the contents of the men's stomachs. Five minutes below, and then a rush up the ladder for a mouthful of fresh air. That was the way in which the job was done; and no champagne was ever more exhilarating than the great gulps of freshness that we took into our lungs when the duty had been accomplished and we returned to the deck; but, during the whole of the voyage, it was necessary to descend into the bowels of this floating caravansera, at short intervals at night, to see that the lights were properly protected or handled, so that there should be no chance of fire breaking out with this mass of people on board. And now, while I think of it, as so much has been said of the desertion of officers of the army at that time, let me say, that there was not one officer who left Fort Clark on this march who was not now on board of this ship, and several, too, were Southern men. During the early hours of the next morning a "norter" sprang up; the vessel labored heavily at her anchors, and it became evident, as the gale increased, that we would have to run for it; but, at daylight, away off to the west of us, the smoke of a large steamer was sighted and reported, and it was then known that the "Star of the West" was in sight with the remaining companies of the Third on board, and a council of the older officers was immediately called to consider whether it was expedient, or even possible (with the sea that was now running and the baggage of the two commands so mixed in the hold), to disembark the cavalry and take Sibley's command on board. It was determined, and very properly so, that it *was* not, and the Captain

of the ship was so instructed. The Government of the State of Texas had kept faith with us, but violated it most grossly with Sibley and all who came after him, and they were all made prisoners of war. Of this, however, we knew nothing until long after. There was now no time to be lost; the anchors were quickly weighed: our head pointed toward Havana; the seas, by this time, running very high and short; now causing her stem to point almost to the zenith, and then tossing her stern up into the clouds, taking your stomach up with you, as you stood well aft, but leaving it up there, with your heart and all of its accompaniments, when you started down. Groans, retchings, and the din of clattering dishes was the order of things below, which, with the racing of the screw as it leaves the water when she pitched, and the grinding and yelling of the ship's timbers and bulk-heads, and the howling of the wind, rendered it impossible to make one's self heard, unless you could crawl into your companion's ear and yell directly against his drum. This state of affairs lasted all of that day and a part of the next night; but, as the sun appeared, the gale broke: the sea went down rapidly, and by noon most of our people were on deck, a good deal discouraged as to their sea legs, but willing to make an effort. The next day, or the day after, —I do not recollect the length of the run— we sighted the Island of Cuba, and, in a short time, were passing into the harbor of Havana, under the guns of Mora Castle, and came to anchor abreast of the Custom House steps. Hardly had the anchor touched the bottom before we were surrounded by shore boats,

with proffers of service, or fruit for sale. Among these, pushing its way through the cordon of craft, came a handsome gig with a gentleman standing up in the stern, who hailed us in English, asking from whence we came and whither we were bound. After he had satisfied his curiosity, or, perhaps, his business errand, he told us that there was a report that Fort Sumpter had been fired on by the people of Charleston, South Carolina, but that the rumor was not believed. Nor surely did we believe it, as a struggle between the sections was some thing that we had not thought of—at least, neither I nor those with whom I was intimate had so thought—and the matter passed without much remark. At first we were not permitted to land, but, as soon as it was discovered who we were, the Captain General of the Island sent a very kind invitation to the officers and their wives to visit him at the Palace, at the same time presenting us with the liberty of the city, and we responded in full uniform, being received very kindly; after which we strolled about, seeing the sights, listening to the music of the magnificent band, riding in the volantes, seeing the black negroes at Dominica's kneeding the hot guava jelly, naked to their waists, the perspiration streaming into the mixture—since which time my wife has lost her taste for guava—and pitying the strings of galley slaves, who shuffled along to their work, chained two and two, with stooped backs, and all of the hope gone out of their faces, and then back to the ship for supper, and a rest; and, as we went off in the boat, we saw, for the first time, the Confederate flag flying at the mast-head of a schooner; but, as the flag was not

recognized by the Cuban Government, they were not allowed to fly it at their gaff, nor had they been allowed to pass the Castle with it displayed as they came in, or, as far as I could find out, was any especial significance attached to it. Here we laid for two days, and on the afternoon of the second day, our convoy came in, saluted the Castle, and dropped her anchor near us, when we found that the norther, that we had encountered, had driven her far out of her course, and that she had been, only now, able to make the harbor. And now we were coaled, and, just before sundown, we got our anchor, passed through the narrow gate of the entrance, with the huge rock on which the fort was built frowning down upon us, one of our bands playing the national airs of Spain: and, when the sun dipped into the Gulf for his evening bath we had Mora Castle well astern, and were rolling along in a most jolly sort of a way for the broad bosom of the Atlantic. From here, the voyage was without incidents of especial interest, though most enjoyable, until we were boarded by the pilot, off Sandy Hook, and then a shell of news was dropped into our quiet camp, whose explosion brought with it the utmost consternation and sorrow. Never can I forget the effect that this story of the pilot had upon every one on board of the ship, fore and aft: nor can I expect to describe it in such a way as to take you back with me to that time and place you at my side on the deck of that steamer. His news was that Fort Sumpter had fallen to the guns of rebellious South Carolinians, and that fighting was now going on all over the country. This, of course, was exaggerated: but we did

not know it, and thought it the truth. Recollect that we had come home perfectly ignorant of the true state of affairs, with no thought but that what was told us in Texas was true; not brought to the crisis gradually, as the people of the North had been, but shoved against it in all of its hideousness, without a moment's warning. The blow was stunning, and, as we got closer to the city, and boat after boat passed us loaded with troops and munitions of war, colors flying, bands filling the air with patriotic strains, soldiers rending the skies with their cheers as the boats passed or overtook each other, I saw men and officers clinging to each other and crying like children, until poor old Captain Whiting, of the Second Cavalry, tore himself away from his friend, drew the back of his hand impatiently across his eyes to clear his sight, and then, jumping on the rail and clinging to a back stay, he called the men to attention, and sang out, "Now, men, give the old flag three times three with a will, and take the time from me," and with a wave of his hand and a hip! hip!! hip!!! such a yell, and such another, and then such another went up from that deck as I have never heard before or since—full of tears, full of rage, and better than all, full of devotion to the dear old "gridiron." And now the war had begun, and the time "before the war" had ceased, and, with it, my theme has come to an end, and I thank you, comrades, for your kind attention to the recital of my memories.

• W. H. BELL,
Major and Commissary of Subsistence.

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